

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 09726 01 OF 02 141227Z
ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
USIA-06 ACDA-07 MCT-01 EB-07 TRSE-00 LAB-04 SIL-01
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R 141210Z JUN 77
FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4982
INFO AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMCONSUL BELFAST

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 LONDON 09726

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, PDEV, UK
SUBJECT: NORTHERN IRELAND: HMG'S VIEWS OF CURRENT
SITUATION

REF: A) LONDON 9221; B) BELFAST 192; C) LONDON 6941

SUMMARY: THE NORTHERN IRELAND OFFICE (NIO) DOES NOT EXPECT A SIGNIFICANT BREAKTHROUGH IN THE NI POLITICAL SITUATION IN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, BUT BELIEVES THE RECENT LOCAL ELECTIONS REFLECT A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT TOWARD MODERATION. HMG, ACCORDINGLY, WILL CONTINUE DISCREETLY TO ENCOURAGE THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES TO SEEK ACCOMMODATION, BUT WILL NOT TAKE THE INITIATIVE. ITS SECURITY POLICY, DESPITE THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED INCREASES IN SECURITY PERSONNEL AND PRISON SENTENCES FOR SOME TERRORIST-RELATED CRIMES, REMAINS BASICALLY UNCHANGED -- THESE CHANGES REPRESENT MORE OF THE SAME. NI SECRETARY MASON IS EXPECTED TO MAKE A MAJOR STATEMENT ON NI IN EARLY JULY, BUT NO DRAMATIC ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE EXPECTED. THE OUTCOME OF ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBT C, HOWEVER, IS A SOURCE OF CONCERN FOR HMG AND COULD AFFECT
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PAGE 02 LONDON 09726 01 OF 02 141227Z

THE CONTENT OF MASON'S STATEMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. AN EMBOFF MET WITH NIO UNDER SECRETARY BOURN JUNE 13 FOR AN UPDATE ON HMG'S VIEWS OF THE SITUATION IN NI. ALTHOUGH HMG WAS ENCOURAGED BY LAST MONTH'S LOCAL ELECTIONS, WHICH REVEALED A SMALL BUT SIGNIFICANT SHIFT TOWARD MODERATION ON THE PART OF NI VOTERS (REF A), IT

IS NOT OPTIMISTIC THAT THIS SHIFT CAN BE TRANSLATED INTO A POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION IN THE NEAR-TERM. HMG IS STILL RELUCTANT TO TAKE THE INITIATIVE IN FINDING AN ACCOMMODATION, BUT NI SECRETARY ROY MASON AND OTHER OFFICIALS MEET REGULARLY WITH LEADERS OF THE VARIOUS POLITICAL PARTIES AND ENCOURAGE THEIR TENTATIVE EFFORTS TOWARD POLITICAL COMPROMISE. BOURN BELIEVES THAT INITIAL PROGRESS, ASSUMING IT MATERIALIZES, WILL OCCUR AT THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL AND WILL PROBABLY INVOLVE "ADMINISTRATIVE DEVOLUTION". HMG, HE REITERATED, WILL WELCOME ANY REASONABLE AND PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS WHICH ARE ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH COMMUNITIES (READ THE OFFICIAL UNIONIST AND THE SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC AND LABOR PARTIES).

2. ON THE SECURITY FRONT, HMG REMAINS GENERALLY SATISFIED WITH THE CURRENT SITUATION -- DEATHS, INJURIES AND SHOOTING AND BOMBING INCIDENTS CONTINUE TO DECLINE, BEING SUBSTANTIALLY LOWER THAN THOSE REGISTERED IN THE FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF 1976. WEAPONS AND EXPLOSIVE SEIZURES TOO ARE DOWN, WHILE THE NUMBER OF PERSONS CHARGED FOR TERRORIST-RELATED CRIMES IS RUNNING CLOSE TO LAST YEAR'S RECORD. DESPITE THIS PROGRESS, SECRETARY MASON RECENTLY ANNOUNCED A SERIES OF MEASURES HE HAS TAKEN TO INCREASE PRESSURE ON TERRORISTS (REF B). BOURN STRESSED THAT THESE ACTIONS SHOULD NOT BE INTERPRETED AS REPRESENTING A CHANGE IN HMG'S SECURITY POLICY; RATHER, THEY ARE MERELY LARGER DOSES OF THE SAME MEDICINE. BOURN ALSO NOTED THAT THE "INCREASED DOSAGES" WOULD PROBABLY NOT BE PERCEPTIBLE TO THE AVERAGE OBSERVER

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PAGE 03 LONDON 09726 01 OF 02 141227Z

AND IMPLIED THAT MASON'S ANNOUNCEMENT WAS PRINCIPALLY A POLITICAL MOVE TO REWARD THE LESS MILITANT UNIONISTS FOR THEIR OPPOSITION TO LAST MONTH'S GENERAL STRIKE.

3. BOURN NOTED THAT THE DIRECT RULE AND EMERGENCY PROVISIONS ACTS COME UP FOR RENEWAL IN JULY -- THE FORMER WILL BE EXTENDED FOR 12 MONTHS AND THE LATTER FOR 6 MONTHS. SECRETARY MASON PLANS TO USE THE OCCASION OF THEIR INTRODUCTION IN PARLIAMENT TO MAKE A STATEMENT ON NI. HIS STATEMENT WILL BE FOLLOWED BY A MAJOR DEBATE. UNLESS THERE IS SOME UNFORESEEN DEVELOPMENT BEFORE THE WEEK OF JULY 4, BOURN DOES NOT EXPECT MASON'S STATEMENT TO CONTAIN MUCH THAT IS NEW. HMG'S INSISTENCE THAT ANY POLITICAL SETTLEMENT BE BROADLY ACCEPTABLE TO BOTH COMMUNITIES AND ITS WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER ANY PRACTICAL STEPS TOWARD POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION WILL BE STRESSED. THE IMPROVED SECURITY OUTLOOK WILL ALSO RECEIVE PROMINENT MENTION. MASON WILL PROBABLY REAFFIRM THE GOVERNMENT'S COMMITMENT TO A SPEAKER'S

CONFERENCE TO STUDY THE QUESTION OF INCREASED NI REPRE-

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PAGE 01 LONDON 09726 02 OF 02 141219Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 02 OF 02 LONDON 09726

SENTATION IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS, AND MAY ACTUALLY ANNOUNCE THE DATE OF THE CONFERENCE (CONSULTATIONS WITH THE CONSERVATIVES, LIBERALS AND OTHER PARTIES ON THIS MATTER ARE UNDERWAY). THE NIO HAS ALREADY WON CABINET APPROVAL FOR THE NI REPRESENTATION QUESTION TO BE THE FIRST ADDRESSED BY THE SERIES OF SPEAKER'S CONFERENCES WHICH WILL REVIEW PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATION FOR THE ENTIRE UK. THE NIO IS CURRENTLY CASTING ABOUT FOR SOME ECONOMIC NEWS TO INCLUDE IN MASON'S FORTHCOMING STATEMENT, BUT THE CUPBOARD IS PRETTY BARE AFTER THE RECENT HARLAND AND WOLFF CONTRACT (REF C) AND THE EARLIER RETENTION OF SUPPLEMENTARY UNEMPLOYMENT BENEFITS. IN ANY EVENT, THE NIO DOES NOT EXPECT SERIOUS OPPOSITION TO ITS NI POLICY FROM COMMONS.

4. BOURN ASKED EMBOFF HOW THE EMBASSY GAUGED THE ELECTORAL OUTLOOK IN THE REPUBLIC AND AGREED THAT MOST INDICATORS SUGGEST FIANNA FAIL IS GAINING STRENGTH, BUT THAT THE COMPLEX IRISH ELECTORAL SYSTEM PRECLUDED MEANINGFUL FORECASTS. HMG, HE SAID, IS WATCHING THESE ELECTIONS
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PAGE 02 LONDON 09726 02 OF 02 141219Z

CLOSELY, SINCE A FIANNA FAIL VICTORY COULD THREATEN
HMG'S CURRENTLY CLOSE RELATIONS WITH THE GOI.

5. COMMENT: FROM THE CONVERSATION WITH BOURN, IT
SEEMS EVIDENT THAT HMG PERCEIVES NO NEW OPPORTUNITIES
IN NI, BUT IS SATISFIED WITH THE OUTCOME OF THE LOCAL
ELECTIONS -- THUS MORE OF THE SAME IS CALLED FOR. HIS
BRIEF REMARKS ON THE ELECTIONS IN THE REPUBLIC UNDER-
SCORE HMG'S CONCERN ABOUT THE OUTCOME AND ITS POSSIBLE
IMPLICATIONS FOR NI.

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